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Visual Imagery in Parthenaic Song*

Laura Swift

This paper aims to reach a better understanding of what is distinctive about parthenaic song. This may seem a rash undertaking: the quantity of surviving parthenaic poetry is tiny, and gives us a narrow window onto the genre. The problem is further exacerbated by our limited knowledge of the ritual contexts in which *partheneia* were performed: we should therefore remain aware of the risks of generalising.¹ Nevertheless, in recent years some scholars have attempted to understand parthenaic song by focusing on the role the song might have played in the life-cycle of the *parthenoi* themselves, and by reading the poems as relating to some form of transitional experience.² If we follow this line of reasoning, whether or not we regard *partheneia* as a genre-category in the same sense as *paian* or *epinikion*, we can accept that songs performed by young girls may be united by a shared social function.³ In this chapter I aim to take this analysis a step further, by isolating a distinctive feature of songs performed by choruses of young girls: its focus on the visual. Parthenaic song pays particular attention to the appearance and actions of the singers

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- 1 E.g. Calame (2001) 2–3 questions the validity of conceptualising *partheneia* as a genre at all, and prefers to structure young women's song by the other ritual roles it performs (74–88).
- 2 This work was originally pioneered by Calame (1977). Many scholars read the poem as related to issues of female transition and sexuality in general terms, even if they are not convinced by Calame's idea of a specific initiation ritual, and the idea that emerging female sexuality is an important aspect of parthenaic song is widely accepted. For recent treatments see e.g. Lonsdale (1993) 193–205; Stehle (1997) ch. 2; Ingalls (2000); Cyrino (2004).
- 3 For the purposes of this article I use the adjective 'parthenaic' simply to mean 'performed by *parthenoi*', without prejudice to whether the chorus is a *partheneion* in any stricter sense. For further discussion on *partheneia* as a genre see Calame (1977) II 147–176, and for my own position see Swift (2010) ch. 5. Recent work on the broader issue of genre-definition in the archaic period rightly stresses the importance of performance context: see Nagy (1990) 360; Dougherty (1994) 43–44; Ford (2002) 8–13; Ford (2003); Carey (2009).

who perform it; the poems constantly attempt to set up a visual interchange between performers and audience, and do so by directing the gaze of the onlookers. This should not be understood simply as a decorative feature, but rather as one connected with the poetry's function, and with Greek attitudes towards *parthenoi* on a more general level.⁴

Since so few *partheneia* survive, we must turn to other sources in order to build a case; as we shall see, visual language is not used only by genuine parthenaic song, but is also deployed in other types of lyric poetry when the singers describe or evoke female choral performance. Examining these parallels therefore provides corroborating evidence, but also serves an additional purpose, for it suggests that this trope of parthenaic song was not limited to one particular community but was a widespread feature of song performed by unmarried girls. Hence the visual focus in our surviving *partheneia* is not simply a coincidence but rather a distinctive feature of the poems, which later authors drew upon to allude to the genre.

The best place to begin this investigation is with an examination of how surviving *partheneia* deploy visual and physical language (section 1). In order to establish visual self-referentiality as a specifically parthenaic trope, we must also compare the evidence of the parthenaic fragments with the types of self-referentiality we find in male choral lyric (section 2). Male and female singers use different methods to describe their performance, with visual language a feminine speciality.⁵ Conversely, texts which contain descriptions of female choral performance make a rich use of visual language (section 3). Visual self-referentiality is therefore singled out as a distinctive feature of parthenaic performance, and becomes an easy 'short-cut' for evoking this form of song. Having established this pattern and examined the evidence for it, the final part of this article will investigate how this affects our understanding of female choral song and the symbolic role it held in Greek society (section 4).

4 In drawing the audience's attention to the visual beauty of the girls, female choruses add an erotic charge to their song; see Calame (1977) 11 87–91; Calame (1999) 20–33, 186–188. Yet it is important to note that this gaze is one constructed by the chorus for the purpose of public praise, and we cannot therefore assume that it reflects private erotic emotions: cf. Lardinois (2010); Lardinois (2011).

5 This is of course not to deny that the gaze plays a role in male as well as female eroticism: cf. e.g. Pind. fr. 123 S.-M. What distinguishes female singers, however, is the way in which the singers draw attention to their own visual appeal.

1 Exploring the Visual in Parthenaic Fragments

The most important parthenaic fragment is Alcman's first *partheneion* (*PMGF* 1), and it is here that we find the densest clustering of visual language.⁶ The surviving section of the poem is highly self-referential, and this is achieved by means of a systematic focus on the girls' identity and appearance. The poem begins with a (mostly lost) mythological section; the girls then turn to the subject of their own leaders, and the ritual activities they are engaged in.⁷ Two girls, Hagesichora and Agido, are singled out for praise for their exceptional beauty and their importance to the ritual.⁸ This praise is couched in visual terms: the chorus comment on the girls' appearance, and the spectacle they present to the watching audience. Both girls are described through imagery of shining and light. The imagery is introduced with the striking metaphor of Agido herself as sunlight (39–43):

ἔγών δ' αἰδῶ
 Ἀγιδῶς τὸ φῶς ὁρῶ
 ἦ ὥτ' ἄλιον, ὄνπερ ἄμιν
 Ἀγιδῶ μαρτύρεται
 φαίνην.⁹

But I sing of the light of Agido: I see her like the sun, which Agido summons to shine for us.¹⁰

Thus Agido is not only involved in a ritual involving the sun, but she becomes sun-like in her visual splendour;¹¹ her appearance and her ritual activity are

6 For a detailed study of the visual as an important theme in Alcman. *PMGF* 1 see Peponi (2004). The importance of visual imagery is also noted by Ferrari (2008) 114–116.

7 The connection between the myth and the surviving sections of the poem is much discussed, and the most convincing explanations see it as moralising on suitable and unsuitable ways to find marriage partners: see Page (1951) 31–33; Garvie (1965); Stehle (1997) 30–35. For the thematic connections between myth, performance context, and the imagery used by the chorus, see Bowie (2011).

8 I agree with West (1965) 197 that the question as to which of the two is more desirable is not a useful one: we should see the praise as singling these girls out from the others rather than comparing the two.

9 I print the text of Alcman. fr. 1 and 3 as given in *PMGF*, except at 1.77 where I print τηρεῖ (see n. 17) and 1.80–81 where I print the text as given in Hutchinson (2001).

10 The meaning of μαρτύρεται and how it should be interpreted is disputed, though does not affect my argument here: see West (1965) 194–195; Hutchinson (2001) 86.

11 Cf. Peponi (2004) 299.

presented as inextricably linked, expressed in the relative ὅνπερ (41), which indicates a specific and definite connection.¹² Hagesichora also shines, but her brightness is portrayed as that of precious metals (50–57):

ἦ οὐχ ὀρήϊς; ὁ μὲν κέλης
 Ἐνετικός· ἅ δὲ χαίτα
 τᾶς ἐμᾶς ἀνεψιάς
 Ἀγησιχόρας ἐπανθεῖ
 χρυσὸς [ὦ]ς ἀκήρατος·
 τό τ' ἀργύριον πρόσωπον
 διαφάδαν τί τοι λέγω;
 Ἀγησιχόρα μὲν αὖτα·

But don't you see? The racehorse is Enetic, and the hair of my cousin Hagesichora blooms like pure gold, and her face is silver—but why do I tell you openly? This is Hagesichora here.

Imagery of shining and of precious metal is a conventional way of praising female beauty, but it is the visual aspect of such imagery which is stressed here.¹³ In the case of Agido this is achieved by combining the visual focus with the ritual activity being performed (41–42). With Hagesichora the audience is explicitly asked whether they see her (ἦ οὐχ ὀρήϊς; 50) and so reminded that she is present before them. They then go on to question why they should need to verbalise what is visually obvious (56–57), and in doing this they alert the audience to their visual focus and foreground it as a poetic technique.¹⁴

The focus on the visual is not limited to the girls' leaders but extends to the other members of the chorus. Eight other girls are named, and singled out for aspects of their appearance (64–81):

οὔτε γάρ τι πορφύρας
 65 τόσσοις κόροις ὥστ' ἀμύναι,
 οὔτε ποικίλοις δράκων

12 Moreover, ὅσπερ is rare in lyric (cf. West (1965) 195) and so the emphasis is likely to be particularly significant.

13 Cf. Sapph. fr. 16.17 v. for the 'bright sparkle' (ἀμάρυγμα λάμπρον) of Anactoria, and fr. 34, 96.8–9 v. where the girl shines like the moon. In any case, the visual focus of this imagery may fit into the same broad pattern as described here, with the light imagery used as a strategy to focus on the girls' visual display.

14 Cf. Peponi (2004) 302.

- παγχρύσιος, οὐδὲ μίτρα
 Λυδία, νεανίδων
 ἱανογ[λ]εφάρων ἄγαλμα,
 70 οὐδὲ ται Ναννώς κόμαι,
 ἀλλ' οὐ[δ'] Ἀρέτα σιειδῆς,
 οὐδὲ Σύλακίς τε καὶ Κλησισηῖρα,
 οὐδ' ἐς Αἰνησιμβρο[ό]τας ἐνθοῖσα φασεῖς·
 Ἀσταφίς [τ]έ μοι γένοιτο
 75 καὶ ποτιγλέποι Φίλυλλα
 Δαμαρ[έ]τα τ' ἐρατά τε Φιανθεμίς·
 ἀλλ' Ἀγησιχόρα με τηρεῖ.
 οὐ γὰρ ἀ κ[α]λλίσφυρος
 Ἀγησιχ[ό]ρ[α] πάρ' αὐτεῖ,
 80 Ἀγιδοὶ δὲ παρμένει
 θωστήρι[ά] [τ'] ἄμ' ἐπαινεῖ.

For so much purple is not sufficient to protect us, nor an intricate snake of solid gold, nor a Lydian headband, the glory of dark-eyed girls, nor the hair of Nanno, nor godlike Areta nor Thylacis and Cleesithera, and you will not go to Aenisimbrotia and say “if only Astaphis could be mine and Philylla could look my way and Damareta and lovely Wianthemis.” No, it is Hagesichora who protects me. But Hagesichora with her fair ankles is not here; she stays by Agido and approves of our ritual.

The girls' desirability is expressed through the beauty of their bodies, in particular their eyes and hair (ἱανογ[λ]εφάρων, 69; κόμαι, 70), and through the luxurious splendour of their accessories. The purple they wear is so extensive that it can be described only as τόσος (65). The golden bangle is described in loving detail: not only are we told that it is shaped like a coiled snake, but the singers also highlight its intricate craftsmanship (ποικίλος, 66) and its value (παγχρύσιος, 67). The Lydian headband also suggests visual glory and exoticism, drawing on ideas of the East as a source of luxury.¹⁵ Each item is listed and described quickly, before the girls move on to the next: again the implication is that the chorus are drawing the audience's attention to what they can already see, and encouraging them to focus their gaze on these details. The importance of looking as an act of desire is reflected in the idiom ποτιγλέποι

15 Cf. Sapph. fr. 98 v. where Sappho explains to Cleis that she cannot give her a Lydian headband.

(75) used to express the speaker's longing for Philylla. The description culminates with a recapitulation of how exceptional Hagesichora is,¹⁶ and once more the chorus break off to remind their listeners that what they describe is simultaneously taking place: the actions of Hagesichora and Agido need no further elucidation, as the audience can see them performing their roles in the ritual.

When we turn to Alcman's other surviving *partheneion* (*PMGF* 3) a similar pattern emerges. The poem is much more fragmentary, but what remains demonstrates a striking focus on the visual and physical aspects of female performance.¹⁷ The song opens with a description of the chorus' arrival in the public sphere, and the dance they will perform (7–10):

ὔπνον ἄ]πὸ γλεφάρων σκεδ[α]σεῖ γλυκύν
]ς δέ μ' ἄγει πεδ' ἄγῶν' ἴμεν
 ᾄχι μά]λιστα κόμ[αν ξ]ανθὰν τινάξω·
].σχ[ἄπ]αλοὶ πόδες

It will scatter sweet (sleep) from my eyes and it causes me to go to the assembly (where) I will vigorously shake my blonde hair ... tender feet
 ...

The action of shaking the hair is presented as a future event, yet refers to an action which the audience is imagined as seeing (or being about to see) taking place in the dance before them.¹⁸ The intensity implied in μά]λιστα (9) encourages the audience to focus on this gesture as a significant one, while also suggesting its speed and vigour. The chorus direct our attention to their feet, described as 'tender' (ἄπ]αλοί, 10), and this suggests further emphasis on their movements and the steps of their dance.¹⁹ When the text resumes

16 For the purposes of the argument here, it makes little difference whether we read τηρεῖ or τείρει: in either case the girls list their own beauty and finery in order to set Hagesichora up as the most important. I print τηρεῖ as it seems to make most sense of the earlier use of ἀμύναι (65) and with the wider pattern of Hagesichora's protective role: for a fuller explanation see Swift (2010) 178–179.

17 See Peponi (2007).

18 Cf. Hutchinson (2001) 107: 'the words accentuate the beauty the audience see'. For a discussion of this future deictic projection see D'Alessio (2004).

19 For ἀπαλός used with erotic overtones cf. Sapph. fr. 94.22, 96.13, 122, 140 v., Semon. fr. 7.57 w. Likewise, women's feet (and particularly ankles) are often described as a mark of

after the damaged section the chorus are discussing Astymeloisa, and as with Hagesichora and Agido, it is her appearance and gestures which are stressed (61–81):

- λυσιμελεί τε πόσῳ, ταχερώτερα
 δ' ὕπνω καὶ σανάτῳ ποτιδέρκεται·
 οὐδέ τι μαψιδίῳς γλυκ..ήνα·
 Ἄ[σ]τυμέλοισα δέ μ' οὐδὲν ἀμείβεται
 65 ἀλλὰ τὸ]ν πυλεῶν' ἔχοισα
 [ὦ] τις αἰγλά[ε]ντος ἀστήρ
 ὠρανῶ διαιπετήs
 ἦ χρύσιον ἔρνος ἦ ἀπαλὸ[ν ψίλ]ον
 .^.]ν
 70]. διέβα ταναοῖς πο[σί·]
 –κ]ομος νοτία Κινύρα χ[άρ]ις
 ἐπὶ π]αρσενικᾶν χαίταισιν ἴσδει·
 Ἄ]στυμέλοισα κατὰ στρατόν
] μέλημα δάμῳι
 75]μαν ἐλοῖσα
]λέγω·
]εναβαλ' α[ί] γὰρ ἄργυριν
].[.]ία
]α ἴδοιμ' αἶ πῶς με..ον φιλοι
 80 αἶσ]σον [ί]ο]ῖς ἀπαλᾶς χηρὸς λάβοι,
 αἶψά κ' [ἐγών ι]κέτις κήνας γενοίμαν·

And with limb-loosening desire, and she looks at me more meltingly than sleep or death; not in vain is she sweet. But Astymeloisa does not reply to me (but) holding her garland like a bright star flying through the skies or a golden shoot or delicate down ... she goes through on her outstretched feet ... the moist charm of Cinyra sits on the girl's hair. Astymeloisa ... through the crowd as the care of all the people ... taking ... I say ... silver cup ... I could see whether she might love me; if only she would come (nearer) and take my soft hand I would immediately become her suppliant.

youthful beauty: cf. *HHDem* 2, 77; Sapph. fr. 44.15 v. (conversely for fat ankles as a mark of female ugliness, Archil. fr. 206 w.).

Astymeloisa's power is described through her gaze (ταχερώτερα ... ποτιδέρκεται, 61–62); the act of looking comes once again to the fore, and this activity is also construed as sexually charged.²⁰ Like Hagesichora and Agido, Astymeloisa is described with imagery of shining light: she is like a bright star or a golden shoot (68), and her beauty and sensuality is expressed through the focus on her perfumed hair.²¹ Again the chorus stress their physical separation from her and comment on the actions which the audience can see her performing: in particular, her carrying of the ritual basket (65).

Pindar's *daphnêphorikon partheneion* (fr. 94b S.-M.) was composed in a different time and place to Alcman's *partheneia*, yet on analysis we see a similar focus on the actions of the girls in his chorus.²² Like Alcman *PMGF* 3 the poem begins with a focus on the girls' activities (9–12):

ἀλλὰ ζωσαμένα τε πέπλον ὠκέως
 χερσίν τ' ἐν μαλακαῖσιν ὄρπακ' ἀγλαόν
 δάφνας ὀχέοισα πάν-
 δοξον Αἰολάδα σταθμόν
 υἱοῦ τε Παγώνδα
 ὑμνήσω στεφάνοισι θάλ-
 λοισα παρθένιον κάρα,

But quickly tying up my robe and carrying in my gentle hands a splendid branch of laurel, I shall hymn the all-glorious house of Aioladas and of his son Pagondas, my maidenly head flourishing with garlands.

The girls draw the audience's attention to the details of their costume: the robes they wear, the laurel in their hands, the garlands on their heads. Their

20 The power of the beloved's gaze is a common *topos* of erotic poetry: cf. Ibyc. *PMGF* 287; Anacr. *PMG* 360; Simon. fr. el. 22 w.

21 For hair as an erotic symbol cf. Archil. fr. 31 w.; Sapph. fr. 98, 103.12 v. Semon. fr. 7.57 w. describes excessive attention to hair as a mark of the luxurious 'mare' woman.

22 Klinck (2001) suggests that Pindar's adoption of the female persona is more forced than Alcman's, yet she does not in my view demonstrate adequately that this is so. Differences between Pindar and Alcman (for example the absence of homoerotic language in Pindar) can be better ascribed to differences in ritual occasion and cultural context rather than the style of the poets. Similarly, the fact that Pindar's chorus contains more explicit praise (of the *daphnêphoros*) is surely more to do with the requirements of the festival itself than the poet's personal taste. Rather, we should turn the argument round and say that it is particularly striking that a poet such as Pindar, who often speaks *in propria persona*, composes so firmly in a parthenaic voice in this poem.

description of tying up their robes further eroticises the act of watching, for the audience is not only encouraged to notice their clothing but to imagine them in the brief moment (ὥκῆως, 9) while they are in the process of putting it on. This erotic charge is perpetuated by the epithets they give to their bodies: their hands are 'gentle' (μαλακαῖσιν) and their heads 'maidenly' (παρθένιον, 12) and both adjectives remind us of their status and desirability, while the transference of θάλλοισα (12) from the garlands to their heads suggests their own potential fertility, and evokes the tradition of comparing youthful beauty to natural growth.²³

Poetry performed by *parthenoi* therefore shows a systematic focus on visual beauty and physical activity: we are constantly reminded what the performers look like, how they are dressed, and what they are doing. Yet the degree to which this is a distinctive feature of parthenaic song becomes still more apparent if we compare what we have seen in surviving *partheneia* to choral lyric performed by male singers.

2 Self-Referentiality in Male Choral Song

Self-referentiality and deixis are common features of choral lyric, found throughout the surviving poetry.²⁴ Yet on analysis the type of self-referentiality we find in poetry performed by males is qualitatively different to that of female song: we find none of the visual focus of parthenaic lyric. While male singers may refer to the fact that poetry is being performed, to the performance occasion, or to the poet's control over the song, they refrain from drawing attention to their own appearance, dance, or gestures.

A good place to begin this comparison is *epinikion*, the choral genre with which modern scholars are most familiar.²⁵ Pindar's poetry is steeped with self-referentiality: the songs regularly remind us that they are a crafted piece of praise poetry determined by the poet's choices. To take a single example, *Olympian 2* begins with the poet pondering his topic and theme of song (1–6):

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- 23 This imagery can be applied to both men and women: cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 17.53, 18.56, 18.437, *Od.* 14.175; Sapph. fr. 115 v. (of men); Sapph. fr. 105ab v.; Hom. *Od.* 6.162–169; Aesch. *Suppl.* 998, 1015; Soph. *Trach.* 144–150; Theoc. 18.29–30 (of women).
- 24 For general discussions of deixis in lyric poetry see Rösler (1983); Danielewicz (1990); Bonifazi (2004); Calame (2004a) esp. 427–432, and see also n. 30 below.
- 25 I take as a starting premise that *epinikia* were probably most commonly performed by choruses, yet as I argue below, the lack of certainty on this issue is indicative of the poems' lack of interest in the actions of their performers.

ἀναξιφόρμιγγες ὕμνοι,
 τίνα θεόν, τίν' ἥρωα, τίνα δ' ἄνδρα κελαδήσομεν;
 ἦτοι Πίσα μὲν Διός· Ὀλυμπιάδα
 δ' ἔστασεν Ἡρακλῆς
 ἀκρόθινια πολέμου·
 Θήρωνα δὲ τετραορίας ἔνεκα νικαφόρου
 γεγωνητέον,

Songs, lords of the lyre, which god, which hero, which man shall I sing of? Indeed, Pisa belongs to Zeus, and Heracles established the Olympic Games as the spoils of battle, and Theron must be proclaimed because of his victorious chariot.

The ode begins by questioning its genre, as the poet feigns uncertainty as to whether his topic of song will be a god, a hero, or a mortal man, before combining all three in the story of Theron's victory at Olympia. This type of poetic deliberation and control of the song is extremely common in Pindar, and found extensively throughout the surviving poems.²⁶ A particularly striking use of the motif of poetic control is found at the start of *Isthmian* 2, where the poem begins by criticising the contemporary system of paid poets and looks back with nostalgia to a nobler era when the Muse was free to choose (1–16). Pindar is felt to be unusually self-conscious in style yet we also see the same tropes used by Bacchylides.²⁷ For example, after telling the lengthy narrative of Heracles in the underworld in poem 5, he breaks off with a stern appeal to his Muse to return to more typical epinician material (176–186):

Λευκώλενε Καλλιόπα,
 στᾶσον εὐποίητον ἄρμα
 αὐτοῦ· Δία τε Κρονίδα
 ὕμνησον Ὀλύμπιον ἀρχαγὸν θεῶν,
 τόν τ' ἀκαμαντορόαν Ἄλ-
 φεόν, Πέλοπός τε βίαν,
 καὶ Πίσαν ἔνθ' ὁ κλεηνδός
 [πο]σὶ νικάσας δρόμῳ

26 For ownership of the praise-song, cf. also *Ol.* 3.1–9, 4.1–5, 7.1–10, 9.21–27, 10.1–6, 11.8–15, 13.11–12, *Pyth.* 2.1–6, 9.1–4, 10.4–7, *Nem.* 1.7, 3.9–17, 4.9–13, 5.1–5, 10.19–22, *Isth* 1.1–12, 8.5–7.

27 For the differences between Pindaric and Bacchylidean style, see Carey (1999) 18–19; however, see Bacch. 1.183–184 and 5.16–33 for a similar focus on poetic control of praise and *areté*.

[ἦλθ]εν Φερένικος (ἔς) εὐπύργους Συρα-
κόσσας Ἰέρωνι φέρων
[εὐδ]αιμονίας πέταλον.

White-armed Calliope, stop your well-wrought chariot here. Sing of Zeus the son of Cronus, the Olympian chief of the gods, and of the tireless stream of Alpheus, and the might of Pelops, and Pisa, where famous Pherenicus sped on his feet to victory in the race and brought back the leaf of good fortune for Hieron to Syracuse of the fine towers.

The poetic style here plays on a high level of self-referentiality: the poem alludes to its audience's awareness that they are listening to a piece of *epinikion*, composed around certain conventions, and that the poet can control the degree to which these conventions are followed or manipulated.²⁸ Similar techniques include Pindar's self-conscious rejection of particular versions of myth (e.g. *Ol.* 1.52, *Ol.* 9.30–36), and his construction of a reciprocal relationship with his patron (e.g. *Ol.* 1.108–117, *Nem.* 1.19–22, *Nem.* 7.61–67).²⁹ Moreover, Pindar makes regular use of deixis, drawing his audience's attention to the fact that a real performance is taking place before them.³⁰ Yet despite this high level of metapoetic awareness, we find virtually no explicit comment on what the singers are doing when the poetry is performed.³¹ A comparison between the examples we have examined in *partheneia* and the description of dancing at the start of *Pythian* 1 makes clear how different a style this is (1–4):

χρυσέα φόρμιγξ, Ἀπόλλωνος καὶ ἰοπλοκάμων
σύνδικον Μοισᾶν κτέανον· τὰς ἀκούει
μὲν βάσις ἀγλαΐας ἀρχά,

28 For this kind of 'Abbruchsformel' as an epinician device see Mackie (2003) ch. 1.

29 For praise poetry construed as a form of reciprocal gift-giving see Martin (1984); Gentili (1988) 162–176; Nagy (1989); Kurke (1991) 97–107; Maclellan (1993) 103–105; Hornblower (2004) 30–32; Boeke (2007) 81–87; Burnett (2008) 20–21.

30 For discussions of how analysing deixis can add to the interpretation of individual odes, see e.g. Felson (1999); Athanassaki (2004); Felson (2004); Martin (2004); Calame (2008).

31 Scholars who see the poetic 'I' as referring exclusively to the poet might give this as an explanation for the omission. Yet even if one were to take the line that epinician 'I' always represents Pindar and never the chorus, it would still be striking that Pindar should have so little interest in portraying the moment of the ode's actual performance. A better explanation might be that epinician poets avoid pinning the ode down to a particular setting to increase its potential for future reperformance by the victor's family.

πείθονται δ' αἰδοὶ σάμασιν
 ἀγησιχόρων ὁπότεν προοιμίων
 ἀμβολὰς τεύχῃς ἐλελιζομένα.

Golden lyre, rightful possession shared by Apollo and the violet-tressed Muses, it is to you the dance-step listens as it begins the glorious celebration, and the singers obey your signals whenever you prepare with your vibrations to strike up chorus-leading preludes.

The song alludes to a choral performance, but any connection between this dance and the current song is unstated and left for the listener to infer. The audience is equally free to interpret the lines as a general statement about the powers and role of the lyre: we as modern readers are given no solid evidence to guide us as to the actual performance of the lines. Indeed, the scholarly debate about the performance of *epinikia* is the result of similar vagueness throughout extant epinician poetry. If *epinikia* gave us even a small fraction of the performance detail we find in *partheneia* the controversy would be largely resolved.³²

Another important feature is the complexity of the poetic persona: this too has prompted much scholarly discussion, and it is also a telling example of the stylistic differences between epinician and parthenaic song. In *epinikia* there are occasions when the poetic 'I' seems to represent the voice of the poet, and other occasions when it is less clear-cut, and where the 'I' makes general statements which could equally well be attributed to poet or to chorus.³³ Whatever the response of modern readers we must assume from the regularity with which *epinikia* do this that it would not have been troubling or unusual to the original audience. Conversely, the choruses of *partheneia* do not allow us to forget the identity of the chorus that performed them: even though Pindar's *parthenoi* can fulfil general choral functions such as public praise, they remind us who they are (ἐμὲ δὲ πρέπει / παρθενήϊα μὲν φρονεῖν /

32 Arguments for or against choral performance are required to tackle the question of how much we should connect performance-related concepts (e.g. the use of the word *κῶμος*, or the mention of dancing within the poems) to the poems' own performance context: see Heath (1988); Burnett (1989); Carey (1989); Heath and Lefkowitz (1991); Carey (1991); Currie (2004).

33 For various perspectives on this phenomenon see Rösler (1985); Bremer (1990); Gentili (1990); Lefkowitz (1991) 1–71; D'Alessio (1994); Lefkowitz (1995). D'Alessio's notion of a shifting persona is particularly illuminating, and accounts for the flexibility of lyric personae. For the shifting nature of the 'I' in Bacchylides, see Calame (2011).

γλώσσαί τε λέγεσθαι, 'it is right for me to think maidenly thoughts and to speak them with my tongue,' 33–35).³⁴

Epinikia and *partheneia* are distinguished by more than just the gender of their performers, so in order to make the case that male and female self-referentiality are different we must look to other male lyric genres. An examination of Pindar's *paianes* tells a similar story: again, self-referentiality is common, but little of it is visual. As in *epinikia*, we find self-conscious comments on the fact that a piece of poetry is being performed. For example, *Paian* 2 begins with a confident statement that the singers will 'drive this *paian*' (παῖ]ᾱνα [δι]ώξω, 4) from Abderus to Aphrodite and Apollo. Thus the chorus not only comment on the context in which the song is being performed (for the Abderites) but also hint at their meta-poetic awareness that the song they are singing belongs to a particular genre.³⁵ Similarly, one of Pindar's *thrēnoi* contains a list of alternative genres—*paian* and Dionysiac song—before explaining the aetiology and sub-divisions of the type of song that it actually is (fr. 128c S.-M.).³⁶

As well as self-conscious control of the song, we find a focus on the performers' own identity. Thus, for example, Pindar's *Paian* 4, composed for the Keans, includes a discussion of what it means to be a Kean (21–24):

ἤτοι καὶ ἐγὼ σ[κόπ]ελον ναίων δια-
γινώσκομαι μὲν ἀρεταῖς ἀέθλων
Ἑλλανίσιν, γινώσκ[ο]μα[ι] δὲ καὶ
μοῖσαν παρέχων ἄλις·

Although I live on a rock, I am well-known throughout Greece for excellence in games; and I am known also for providing the Muse with plenty.

The poem goes on to discuss themes of identity and community in more general terms, but here the focus is explicitly on the chorus, whose involvement is emphasised by the confident ἤτοι καὶ ἐγὼ with which they begin these lines. The performers' identity is of central importance to the poem; indeed the chorus represents all aspects of Keos, including both its harsh environment and

34 Cf. D'Alessio (1994) 120: 'it was only in this kind of poem that the exact identity of the members of the chorus was of ritual importance.' See also Lehnus (1984) 81; Stehle (1997) 98–99.

35 Cf. also Pind. *Pa.* 5.45–48 where the chorus ask to be welcomed to the sound of the *paian* (σὺν μελιγάρυϊ παι/ ἄνος ἀγακ'λέος ὀμφῆ), *Pa.* 6.127–128 where the chorus say they will not put Aegina to bed 'without a dinner of *paianes*' (παιηόνων / ἄδορον).

36 Cf. Cannatà Fera (1990) 137–144.

its claims to greatness.³⁷ The locality of the performance can also be important, and *Paian* 6 opens by paying attention to its Delphic setting. The poem begins with an appeal to Pytho to welcome the singer (λίσσομαι ... ἐν ζαθέωι με δέξαι χρόνῳ, 3–5); he goes on to say he hears the sound of the Castalian spring (ψόφον αἰῶν Κασταλίας, 8) before stating once more that he has come to the shrine of Apollo (κατέβαν ... ἄλσος Ἀπόλλωνος, 8–9), described through its identifying feature, the *omphalos* (ὀμφαλὸν ... σκιάεντα, 17).³⁸

Yet the attention paid to the chorus' identity also serves to highlight the differences with *partheneia*. The male choruses we have examined may draw attention to their identity, their location, or the type of poetry they perform, yet we do not find a parallel to the focus on appearance, accessories, or actions to what we have seen in choruses of young women.

Indeed, a moment's reflection should tell us that the level of visual self-referentiality we find in *partheneia* is surprising. While we as modern readers lack access to the details of the performance, the original audience had no such problem: they could see the appearance, movements and gestures of the chorus before them. Hence the question arises as to why parthenaic choruses feel the need to inform their audiences about details which were visually apparent. The words of the poems treat the audience as though they are unable to see, and need to be guided verbally. Peponi's study of visual deixis in Alcman *PMGF* 1 argues that this use of language should be taken as relevant to the performance context: if we imagine the ritual as a dawn one, the audience may not be able to make out the details of costume and gestures clearly in the half-light; hence the chorus claim to be describing what the audience can see but are actually directing them.³⁹ Yet while this may be a factor in the performance of this particular poem, it is unlikely to be an explanation in other cases: for example, there is no reason to believe that the *daphnêphorikon* was a dawn ritual.⁴⁰ As we

37 Cf. also Pind. *Pa.* 2.24–31 where the chorus speak in the persona of Abderus.

38 On the question of the speaker's identity in this passage, see D'Alessio (1994) 125, and also Kurke (2005) 86–90, who argues that the use of the poetic persona in this poem is unusual for *paian*.

39 Peponi (2004) 308. The timing of the ritual is another source of contention, and partly depends on how one interprets μαρτύρεται / φαίνην in 42–43: if it can mean 'summon to shine', this implies that the sun is not yet in the sky, while if it must mean that she invites the sun to witness (cf. West [1965] 194–195), it implies that it is already visible: see also n. 11. Of course, this opposition between dawn / not dawn may be misleading: the sun either is or is not over the horizon, but the growing light of dawn is a gradual progression not a binary state, and the ritual can still be a dawn one (as most scholars agree) even if the sun is visible by this point.

40 The fullest ancient description is that of Proclus (*Chrest.* 69–78 Severyns ap. Phot. *Bibl.*

shall see, visual self-description is a feature of all kinds of choruses of *parthenoi*, regardless of the details of performance context. We must therefore seek an explanation which does not depend on a particular ritual setting, for it seems that the performers' appearance and actions are embedded into parthenaic poetry in a way we do not find in other types of song.

3 Visual Self-Reference in Evocations of Parthenaic Song

Analysing descriptions of female song in other texts confirms the impression that visual self-referentiality is a fundamental feature of this type of song. When poets want to evoke a chorus of *parthenoi*, this is a device they make use of. For example, in Pindar's *Paian* 2, the chorus describe a dance performed by Delphian maidens (97–102):

ἀμφί τε Παρ[νασ]σίαις
πέτραις ὑψηλαῖς θαμὰ Δ[ελφ]ῶν
λιπαρ]άμπυ[κε]ς ἰστάμεναι χορόν
ταχύ]ποδα π[αρ]θένοι χαλ-
κέαι] κελαδ[έρον]τι γλυκὺν αὐδαῖ
τρόπ]ον·

Among the high rocks of Parnassus the maidens of Delphi with their (gleaming) headbands often set up a (swift)-footed chorus and sing a sweet (melody) with voices strong as bronze.

The singers describe the female chorus in visual terms, dwelling on the trappings of finery (the headbands) and the physicality of their movements (the emphasis on the swift beat of their feet). Similarly, Bacchylides 13 includes a description of a dance of *parthenoi* in honour of Aegina. It begins with a focus on a single girl, whose vigorous movement is emphasised in the phrase 'leaping lightly on her feet like a carefree fawn' (πόδεσσι ταρφέως / ἥντε νεβρὸς ἀπεν[θή]ς, 86–87). Attention then shifts to her companions in the chorus, and here the poet dwells on the details of their costume: the bright colours of the flowers they wear in their hair, and the unusual detail of reeds woven into the garlands

239.321a34–b31), but we have no evidence for the timing of the ritual. Bernardini (1989) 44–45 suggests that the *daphnêphoria* took place at nightfall, by analogy with similar ceremonies in other *poleis*, but it is risky to extrapolate details from rituals from other communities and cults: cf. Finglass (2007) 31.

(ταὶ δὲ στεφανωσάμε[ναι φοιν]ιχέων / ἀνθέων δόνακός, 91–92).⁴¹ In Bacchylides 17, Theseus sees the dance of the Nereids in his visit to the bottom of the sea. These are a chorus of mythological and divine *parthenoi* and represent an idealised form of parthenaic chorus: as such the visual splendour of their dance is given particular force (101–108).⁴²

τόθι κλυτὰς ἰδὼν ἔδει-
σε Νηρέος ὀλβίου
κόρας· ἀπὸ γὰρ ἀγλα-
ῶν λάμπε γυίων σέλας
ὥτε πυρός, ἀμφὶ χαίταις
δὲ χρυσεόπλοκοι
δίνηντο ταινίαι· χορῶι δ' ἔτερ-
πον κέαρ ὑγροῖσιν ἐν ποσίν.

There he was struck with awe as he beheld the glorious daughters of blessed Nereus, for a beam shone from their brilliant limbs as from a fire, and gold-braided ribbons were twirled around their hair. They were delighting their hearts in choral dance with their watery feet.

The Nereids are not simply compared to bright objects, but actually emanate light from their bodies; not only do they wear gold in their hair, but its intricate styling is described in terms that echo the movement of their dance (δίνηντο). Rather than the usual emphasis on the beating or quickness of the girls' feet to capture their physical movements, we find the adjective ὑγροῖσιν, which highlights the bizarre and supernatural nature of this chorus. Even within the context of male choral lyric, then, we see a difference in presentation of male and female choruses: the singers dwell on the visual appeal of watching female choruses, yet do not apply similar language to their own performance.

Dramatic texts are full of occasions where characters either describe parthenaic song or self-represent as parthenaic singers, and the dramatists too look to visual self-reference as a way of evoking such performances. This is

41 For the erotic overtones of this description see Power (2000) 78–80. Power also discusses the use of parthenaic projection to enhance the message of praise sung by the male chorus: cf. also Fearn (2007) 116–119.

42 The Nereids are associated with female transition, as demonstrated by their inclusion in artistic scenes of marriage or abduction, or in traditionally feminine roles: see Barringer (1995) 69–137. Hence they represent a model for parthenaic dance as a precursor to marriage.

particularly striking given that we have little evidence for public performances of female choruses in Athens (though evidence from vases suggests that female choruses did perform at private occasions such as weddings).⁴³ In evoking these details dramatic poets assume that a mass Athenian audience not only knew about parthenaic choral song, but also that they were familiar with its distinctive features. Either Athenians must have had access to the tradition from other *poleis* (from contemporary performances elsewhere, or from earlier lyric such as Alcman circulating as texts), or Athens did in fact have a culture of parthenaic song, albeit one which performed in a more low-key way than its male equivalents, and without the funding and recognition they received. What does seem indisputable, though, is that Aristophanes and the tragedians were well aware of the stylistic tropes of parthenaic song and that they assumed a wide enough knowledge on the part of their audience for it to be worth their while including such references.⁴⁴

The clearest example of this device comes at the end of *Lysistrata*, where we are given a close parody of a Spartan female dance (1302–1320):⁴⁵

εἶα μάλ' ἔμβη,
 ὦ εἶα κοῦφα πᾶλον,
 ὥς Σπάρταν ὑμνίωμες,
 τᾶι σιῶν χοροὶ μέλονται
 καὶ ποδῶν κτύπος,
 (ὄχ') ἄτε πῶλοι ται κόραι
 πᾶρ τὸν Εὐρώταν
 ἀμπαδίοντι, πυκνὰ ποδοῖν
 ἀγκονίωαί,
 ται δὲ κόμαι σείονται
 ἄπερ Βακχᾶν θυρσαδδωᾶν καὶ παιδδωᾶν.
 ἀγῆται δ' ἅ Λήδας παῖς
 ἀγνὰ χοραγὸς εὐπρεπῆς.
 ἀλλ' ἄγε, κόμαν παραμπύκιδδε χερὶ ποδοῖν τε πάδη
 αἶ τις ἔλαφος, κρότον δ' ἀμᾶ ποιή χορωφελήταν,
 καὶ τὰν κρατίσταν παμμάχον, τὰν Χαλκίοικον ὕμνη.

43 For a thorough account of this issue see Parker (2005) 182–183; Trieschnigg (2009): 23–27.

44 Hamilton (1989) discusses the similarities between parthenaic ritual language from different communities.

45 For a discussion of the use of non-dramatic choral forms at the end of *Lysistrata* see Calame (2004b) 162–172.

Step out then! Dance it lightly, in order to celebrate Sparta, which delights in choruses in honour of the gods and in the pounding of feet. The girls leap like fillies beside the Eurotas, raising clouds of dust with their feet, and their hair flows like the hair of bacchantes who play waving their thyrsuses. Leda's daughter leads them, the sacred and noble chorus-leader. Come now, bind up your hair with your hand, and let your feet leap like a deer, and make a noise to help the dance, and sing in praise of the most powerful one, who vanquishes all in battle, she of the Bronze House.

This passage shows a surprising level of familiarity with the details of Spartan cult and with the style of Spartan *partheneia*.⁴⁶ As in Alcman we find a particular woman singled out as a *choragos* figure; here she is Helen, a figure with her own links to Spartan ritual and who did indeed have a shrine by the banks of the Eurotas. Moreover the description of the girls as *πῶλοι* may spring from the general *topos* of describing girls as young animals, but it also ties into their presentation in Laconia, for example the relevance of the Leucippides and the prevalence of horse-imagery in Alcman *PMGF* 1.⁴⁷ As part of this evocation of Spartan female dance, we find a striking focus on the visual. We are told of the girls' dance movements: the lightness of their step (*χοῦφα*, 1304); the beating of their feet (*ποδῶν κτύπος*, 1307); their energetic leaping (*ἀμπαδίοντι*, 1310) and the clouds of dust that their vigour generates (*πυκνὰ ποδοῖν / ἀγκονίωαί*, 1310–1311). Attention is drawn to other gestures, in particular the shaking of their hair (*ταὶ δὲ κόμαι σείονται*, 1312) which is, as we have seen, a common gesture in girls' description of their own dance. Aristophanes presents this choral dance as something characteristically Spartan and connects it with other Spartan details such as cult. Yet as we have seen, the visual focus is found not only in Alcman but also in Pindar's Theban *partheneion*, as well as being evoked in descriptions of female choruses in odes produced for cities across the Greek world. It therefore makes more sense to see this as a feature not embedded within one

46 Revermann (2006) 254–259, following a suggestion in Taplin (1993) 58 n. 7, argues that the ending of *Lysistrata* was not originally composed for an Athenian audience but was a later addition for a Spartan or Spartan-derived audience at a reperformance. However, I find such a radical solution unnecessary: the fact that the ending is unusual is not sufficient reason to suppose that it is not original, or that it could not be poetically effective for an Athenian audience.

47 For the cult of the Leucippides see Wide (1893) 326–332, Kannicht (1969) 381–383, Calame (1977) I 323–330.

particular community, but rather a deep-rooted association which can trigger associations in a range of *poleis*.⁴⁸

Indeed, if we turn to other examples of dramatic choruses evoking parthenaic song, we see that it is presented as a general feature rather than one which indicates a particular *polis*-association. For example, in the *parodos* of Euripides' *Electra*, the chorus describe a festival in honour of Hera in which all the *parthenoi* of Argos will participate (173–174). Like Alcman's *partheneia* these are performances aimed to please a goddess (ἐγὼ[ν] δὲ τᾷ μὲν Ἀώτι μάλιστα φανδάνην ἐρώ, *PMGF* 1.87–88), but the identity of the goddess and the civic context in which the chorus will perform is a different one.⁴⁹ In their description of this choral performance, both *Electra* and the chorus show a similar focus on visual appearance and accessories. In refusing to join the dance, *Electra* claims she has no interest in gold necklaces (οὐδ' ἐπὶ χρυσέοις / ὄρμοις ἐκπεπόταμαι, 176–177), and in response the chorus offer to lend her fine clothing (πολύπηνα φάρεα, 191) and gold accessories (χρύσεά τε χάρισιν, 192). Again, the description of the dance focuses on its speed and movement, and the whirling and beating of the girls' feet (οὐδ' ἰστάσα χοροὺς / Ἀργείαις ἅμα νύμφαις / εἰλικτὸν κρούσω πόδ' ἐμόν, 178–180). *Electra*'s insistence on her own visual inadequacy and physical squalor therefore serves a symbolic purpose: whereas clothing and hair are normally mechanisms for evoking female dance, *Electra* uses them in order to justify her own refusal to dance (σκέψαι μου πιναρὰν κόμαν / καὶ τρύχη τάδ' ἐμῶν πέπλων, 184–185). This rejection of normal parthenaic activities is connected to *Electra*'s own liminal status, as someone who is neither truly *parthenos* nor *gunê*.⁵⁰ Hence *Electra* refuses to dance with the other *parthenoi* but also rejects the company of the married women (ἀναίνομαι γυναῖκας οὔσα παρθένος, 311). In order to express *Electra*'s problematic status and her alienation from female ritual normality, Euripides draws on the tropes of parthenaic song, and like Aristophanes he uses visual and physical language to do so.⁵¹

48 Bierl (2007), who also notes the parthenaic associations of this passage, suggests a theme of female transition and sexuality running throughout *Lysistrata*, which would add further weight to the parthenaic allusion here. See also Bierl (2011).

49 The identity of the goddess in Alcman's *PMGF* 1 is a source of much contention, though not important to the argument here: for various suggestions see Page (1951) 76; Burnett (1964) 32–33; Garvie (1965); Griffiths (1972) 24–27; Clark (1996) 157; Cyrino (2004).

50 Cf. Zeitlin (1970) 650; Cropp (1988) on 312–313.

51 For a fuller discussion of the symbolic connotations of this passage see Swift (2010) 189–191.

Other tragic descriptions of choruses of *parthenoi* also follow this trend: visual language is used in order to create a quick sketch of a chorus of *parthenoi*. The connection between parthenaic song, female transition and visual appeal is encapsulated by Cassandra's appeal for a parthenaic performance to participate in her fake *hymenaios* in *Trojan Women* (ἴτ', ὦ καλλίπεπλοι Φρυγῶν / κόραι, μέλπετ' ἐμῶν γάμων, 'Come, girls of Phrygia with your beautiful robes, sing of my marriage,' 338–339). The chorus of this play are not *parthenoi* but married women (cf. 1081), but the imaginary wedding calls for a performance by maidens, and so the chorus are construed in that light for the purpose.⁵² And in portraying them as a chorus of *parthenoi*, Cassandra describes them via the detail of their dresses, again emphasising the close connection between the dance she requires and the visual display involved. Similarly, in *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*, the chorus imagine returning to Greece and performing to celebrate a wedding (1143–1152):

χοροῖς δ' ἐνσταίην, ὅθι καὶ
 † παρθένος εὐδοκίμων γάμων
 παρὰ πόδ' εἰλίσσουσα φίλας
 ματέρος, ἡλίκων θιάσους
 ἐς ἀμίλλας χαρίτων
 ἀβροπλούτοιο χαίτας εἰς ἔριν
 ὀρνυμένα πολυποίκιλα φάρεα
 καὶ πλοκάμους περιβαλλομένα
 γένυσιν ἐσκίαζον†.

May I take part in the choruses where † as a girl at glorious weddings
 I once whirled around near my dear mother, and in a contest of grace
 with my age-mates, stirring up competition with my luxurious hair and
 intricate clothing, I let down my tresses to shade my cheek.†

This imaginary chorus takes place in a context different from that in which Alcman's *parthenoi* performed, and different too from the parthenaic chorus of *Electra*: rather than being part of a religious festival it is for a wedding.⁵³ Yet

52 Portraying married women as *parthenoi* in order to express a form of transition they are undergoing is a common technique in Greek poetry: see Swift (2010) 192.

53 Some scholars have suggested that Alcman's *PMGF* 1 was in fact a wedding song: see Griffiths (1972); Gentili (1988) 75–76. I see it as more likely to have represented an earlier stage in the development of *parthenoi* (part of their transition to a marriageable state of life rather

the symbolic connection is clear, for wedding song is an action which symbolises the successful completion of the journey to maturity. Moreover, it is the chorus' status as *parthenoi* which is foregrounded in this description: they are close to their mothers (παρὰ ... φίλας / ματέρος, 1145–1146), and in a group of their age-mates (ἡλικῶν θιάσους, 1146) in contrast with the bride's separation from both mother and companions.⁵⁴ Here too we find an emphasis on the performers' visual splendour. Once again, the girls' dance is a whirl of movement (εἰλίσσουσα, 1145); the poet dwells on the details of their hair and clothing (ἄβροπλούτοιο χαίτας ... πολυποίκιλα φάρεα, 1149–1150), selecting adjectives which emphasise their luxury and beauty. The gesture of the loosening of the hair recalls the shaking of the hair we have seen elsewhere in female choral dance, yet is also an erotic motif which highlights the girls' desirability.⁵⁵ The importance of the visual here is emphasised by the description of the dance as a 'contest in beauty' (ἀμίλλας χαρίτων, 1147), which construes the girls' appearance as one of the main functions of the performance.⁵⁶

When poets seek to evoke choral performance by *parthenoi*, then, they draw on a store of visually-oriented descriptions similar to those we have seen in songs that really were performed by choruses of young women. The repeated use of this motif reinforces the suggestion that this was a distinctive feature of songs performed by *parthenoi*; visual language is felt to be a way of alluding to this type of song and of triggering its associations. Having established a focus on physical appearance, dress, and actions as an important feature of female song, it now remains for us to investigate what light this can shed on the songs themselves, and the role that they played in Greek society.

4 *Parthenoi* on Display

Visual imagery is thus a widespread and pervasive feature of parthenaic performance, and its frequency suggests that it may enrich our understanding of female song in Greek society. We can begin with the songs' own performance

than to marriage itself). The suggestion that the song was connected with transition was first made by Calame (1977), but cf. also Lonsdale (1993) 193–205; Ingalls (2000).

54 Cf. Sapph. fr. 104ab v.; Theoc. 18.12–14, 41–42; Catull. 62.20–22; Plut. *Lyc.* 15; Dion. Hal. 2.30.5. See Seaford (1987) 106–107; Jenkins (1983); Alexiou (1974) 120 (on modern Greek parallels); Swift (2006) 129–130.

55 Cf. Archil. fr. 31 w., where the girl's loosened hair is presented as a central part of her erotic appeal.

56 For a discussion of parthenaic imagery in Eur. *IT* more generally, see Swift (2010) 197–218.

context. The constant reference made to the singers' appearance and gestures sets up a relationship between chorus and audience; the technique construes the audience's gaze as a central part of the performance, and so the onlookers are drawn in to become active participants themselves. In terms of the songs' performance, this is suggestive. Firstly it adds extra weight to the idea that this is a public occasion and not a closed initiation group: the audience is presented as integral to the performance, and the words of the songs attempt to control and guide their response.⁵⁷ Moreover, this adds weight to the views of those scholars who have seen the poems as engaging with the issues that surround female transition.⁵⁸ The visual language is a feminine phenomenon, associated strongly with descriptions of female choruses; this indicates that the performers' own identity is fundamental to the poetry's purpose.

The idea that parthenaic song is associated with female display is further supported by the tragic cases we have examined, where we see these ideas used in a way which demonstrates not only that the poets recognised the visual as a parthenaic motif but also that they were interested in exploring the reasons for it. In the plays discussed above, the chorus evoke the language associated with parthenaic choruses in order to juxtapose the malfunctioning tragic world with the ritual normality associated with the genre. Thus in Euripides' *Electra*, female adornment is used to contrast Electra's dysfunctional state as a *parthenos* whose journey to maturity has failed with the normative model of female development offered by the chorus, while in *IT*, the chorus contrast joyous female display at a wedding—the ultimate goal of female transition—to their state as *parthenoi* kept from a normal female life and forced to participate in the destruction of men. As the poets explore these themes, they deploy visual language as a way to evoke the audience's expectations regarding female song, and, by implication, to create a contrast with the dysfunctional world of tragedy. And foremost among these associations seems to be the connection between parthenaic choruses, visual display, and the transition to sexual maturity.

Nevertheless, the very fact that this motif is so widespread, and is found in texts from a range of periods and *poleis*, should lead us to approach this idea of transition with care. In particular, the pervasive nature of the imagery may suggest that it is misguided to see this transition as rooted in particular ritual

57 The closed initiation group was suggested by Calame (1977) 1 251–304; for a more publicly focused view see Stehle (1997) 31–35.

58 See n. 2.

tasks or moments. The occasions on which real parthenaic choruses performed varied, and the descriptions we have examined vary still further, incorporating a range of religious occasions as well as secular ones such as weddings, yet the focus on appearance and action remains the same in all these contexts. In all cases, the element of transition appears to be grounded in the very act of performing publicly in a chorus, rather than the external context in which the song is taking place.

This role of the chorus as an opportunity for female display is indicated by the common mythological motif of choral performance as an opportunity for girls to be seen by or abducted by gods.⁵⁹ Thus for example in *Iliad* 16, we are told that Hermes was struck by lust when he saw Polymela performing in a choral dance (181–185):

τῆς δὲ κρατὺς Ἀργειφόντης
 ἠράσασατ', ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἰδὼν μετὰ μελπομένησιν
 ἐν χορῶι Ἀρτέμιδος χρυσηλακάτου κελαδαινῆς.
 αὐτίκα δ' εἰς ὑπερῶι' ἀναβάς παρελέξατο λάθρηι
 Ἑρμείας ἀκάκητα,

The strong Slayer of Argus desired her when with his eyes he saw her among the girls singing in a chorus for Artemis of the golden spindle and the loud cry. Straight away gracious Hermes went up to her chamber and lay with her in secret.

Similarly, Aphrodite's story to Anchises in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* includes the detail that she was abducted by Hermes in strikingly similar circumstances (117–120):

νῦν δέ μ' ἀνήρπαξε χρυσόρραπις Ἀργεῖφόντης.
 ἐκ χοροῦ Ἀρτέμιδος χρυσηλακάτου κελαδαινῆς
 πολλὰ δὲ νύμφαι καὶ παρθένοι ἀλφεισίβοιαι
 παίζομεν, ἀμφὶ δ' ὄμιλος ἀπειρίτος ἐστεφάνωτο·

Just now Hermes the Slayer of Argus, bearer of a golden wand, snatched me away from the chorus performing for Artemis of the golden spindle and the loud cry; many of us, nymphs and maidens worth large dowries, were playing together, and a large crowd stood in a circle around us.

59 See Calame (1977) 174–177; Lonsdale (1993) 222–230.

In order to present herself as innocent yet sexually desirable, Aphrodite claims that she was one of a group of *parthenoi* performing in a choral dance. The public nature of the dance is emphasised: it is watched by a 'boundless' group of spectators (ὄμιλος ἀπείριτος, 120). The girls on display are viewed as potential marriage-partners whose value is stressed (ἀλφεσίβοιαι, 119).⁶⁰ The girls' are described as 'playing' (παίζομεν, 120): a word which is also used of Persephone's activities before her abduction in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (4–8):⁶¹

νόσφιν Δῆμητρος χρυσαόρου ἀγλαοκάρπου
παίζουσιν κούρησι σὺν Ὠκεανοῦ βαθυκόλποις,
ἄνθεά τ' αἰνυμένην ῥόδα καὶ κρόκον ἥδ' ἴα καλὰ
λειμῶν' ἄμ μαλακὸν καὶ ἀγαλλίδας ἥδ' ὑάκινθον
νάρκισσόν θ',

Away from Demeter of the golden sword and the shining fruit she was playing with the deep-bosomed daughters of Oceanus, and picking flowers across a soft meadow: roses and crocus and lovely violets, irises and hyacinthus, and the narcissus.

The idea of the girls as a chorus is not made as explicit as in the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, but Persephone is nevertheless snatched from play among her companions, and we are perhaps meant to understand the girls' activities as a dance: the word παίζω is regularly used in this sense.⁶² Euripides' description of Persephone's abduction in *Helen* makes the choral element explicit (τὰν ἀρπασθεῖσαν κυκλίων / χορῶν ἔξω παρθενίων, 1312–1313). Appearing in a chorus, then, is a common *topos* for the ending of virginity, expressed in myth through divine abduction, and it functions similarly to the better-known trope of flower-picking in a meadow.⁶³ The image of the flowery meadow as a location for seduction is a commonplace of myth and poetry; it is not rooted in any individual instance or ritual but rather a deep-seated cultural idea which is regularly

60 The νύμφαι may also be unmarried girls (cf. Hom. *Il.* 9.560), or semi-divine nymphs (usually presented as sexually desirable).

61 For the erotic connotations of παίζω used of young girls, see Rosenmeyer (2004).

62 Cf. Hom. *Od.* 8.251, 23.147; [Hes.] *Shield* 277; Aristoph. *Frogs* 390, 409, *Thesm.* 1227. For the connection between dance and play see Lonsdale (1993) 21–24.

63 For girls abducted from choruses of nymphs see also Hes. fr. 26, 140 M.-W.; Plut. *Thes.* 31.2. For 'historical' abductions from a chorus cf. also Paus. 4.16.9.

used to express the transition to female maturity.⁶⁴ We should view the *topos* of parthenaic choral dance similarly: dancing in a chorus is considered a symbolic act of female display and sexualisation across Greece. It may also have been the case that parthenaic choral dance was associated with particular rituals of female transition, just as we find evidence for flower-picking festivals in which *parthenoi* participated.⁶⁵ Yet we should see any specific ritual association as arising from the more general association between choral dance and female display, rather than the other way around.

This story-pattern is echoed in the Nausicaa episode in the *Odyssey*: an interlude which draws on the *topoi* and language of transition in order to achieve its poetic aims. When Odysseus comes across Nausicaa, she is not performing in a formal chorus, but she and her girls act in a way which evokes the *topos* of female dance as a medium for sexualisation and visual display (6.99–109):

αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ σίτου τάρφθεν δμωαὶ τε καὶ αὐτῇ,
σφαίρηι ται δ' ἄρ' ἔπαιζον, ἀπὸ κρήδεμνα βαλοῦσαι,
τῆσι δὲ Ναυσικάα λευκώλενος ἤρχετο μολπῆς.
οἷη δ' Ἄρτεμις εἶσι κατ' οὖρεα ἰοχέαιρα,
ἢ κατὰ Τηϋῆγον περιμήκετον ἢ Ἐρύμανθον,
τερπομένη κάπροισι καὶ ὠκείησι· ἐλάφοισι·
τῇ δέ θ' ἅμα Νύμφαι, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο,
ἄγρονόμοι παίζουσι· γέγηθε δέ τε φρένα Λητώ·
πασάων δ' ὑπὲρ ἥ γε κάρη ἔχει ἠδὲ μέτωπα,
ῥεῖά τ' ἀριγνώτη πέλεται, καλαὶ δέ τε πάσαι·
ὥς ἢ γ' ἀμφιπόλοισι μετέπρεπε παρθένος ἀδμῆς.

But when she and the maidservants had had their enjoyment of the food, they began to play with a ball, throwing off their veils, and white-armed Nausicaa led the song among them. As Artemis the archer comes down from the mountains, from high Taygetus or Erymantus, delighting in chasing boar or swift deer, and with her play the Nymphs of the wilderness, the daughters of Zeus who bears the Aegis; Leto rejoices in her heart since

64 For the meadow as an erotically charged location cf. Hom. *Il.* 14.294–351; Sapph. fr. 2 v.; Archil. fr. 196a w. For abduction while flower-picking cf. *HHDem.* 4–18; Eur. *Ion* 887–896, *Hel.* 244–249. See Segal (1981) 27–29; Vernant (1983) 135–142; Calame (1999): 151–174; Swift (2009) 365–368.

65 See Strabo 6.1.5.33–38; Pollux 1.37; Paus. 2.35.5; schol. Aristoph. *Frogs* 344b Chantry = Soph. fr. 891 Radt.

Artemis holds her head and brow above all of them, and she is easily known although all of them are beautiful. Thus did the unmarried maiden stand out among her servants.

The girls' play is not an organised chorus, but it is imagined as a type of dance to music: the idea of a ball-game as a dance re-emerges again in Alcinous' palace, when he orders the performance of a ball-dance (this time by a group of young boys) in order to entertain Odysseus (8.250–265): this too is described as a form of 'play' (παίσατε, 8.251). The gesture of taking off the veils is an erotically charged one, hinting at the girls' sexuality, and also perhaps recalls the loosening and tossing of the hair we see elsewhere in female dance.⁶⁶ Nausicaa's ball-dance is followed by a simile comparing her to Artemis pre-eminent among her nymphs, whose purpose is to stress Nausicaa's beauty and the degree to which she outstrips the other girls. Like Hagesichora or Astymeloisa, Nausicaa is exceptional, and all eyes are focused upon her. In order to make this point the poet dwells on the act of viewing, focalizing this through the imagined figure of Leto (106–107); yet the motherly joy of Leto is implicitly contrasted with the less innocent impression that Nausicaa may make on Odysseus when he sees the girls.

Nausicaa and her maids do not intend their dance to be witnessed by outsiders, yet we as the audience can see how it reflects more organised types of female dance, and these evocations link into the sexual overtones of the scene. The idea that the ball-dance echoes cultural *topoi* involving visual display of *parthenoi* is confirmed by the rich clustering of marital language throughout the scene.⁶⁷ Nausicaa's expedition is motivated by her anticipation of her own future marriage (6.27–35), a theme which Odysseus also draws upon in his praise of her (6.158–159, 180–185). When Athene speaks to Nausicaa of her future marriage, she singles out fine clothing as an important focus for a bride-to-be (6.26–28), and once again makes the connection between visual display and sexual appeal. Odysseus' comparison of Nausicaa to a sapling (6.160–169) draws on hymenaeal tropes, as well as the convention of comparing human and natural fertility, while Nausicaa responds by imagining the prospect of a marriage to Odysseus himself (6.244–245). Here too, Nausicaa's sexual desirability is connected with a public and choral display, for Odysseus praises Nausicaa by imagining her family's response as they see her dance (153–159):

66 Cf. Hainsworth (1990) on 6.100. For the *krêdemnon* as a symbol of chastity and marriage see Nagler (1974) 44–60.

67 See Hague (1983) 136–137; Lonsdale (1993) 206–210.

εἰ δέ τίς ἐσσι βροτῶν, οἳ ἐπὶ χθονὶ ναιετάουσι,
 τρὶς μάκαρες μὲν σοί γε πατὴρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ,
 τρὶς μάκαρες δὲ κασίγνητοι· μάλα πού σφισι θυμὸς
 αἰὲν ἐϋφροσύνησιν ἰαίνεται εἵνεκα σείο,
 λευσσόντων τοιόνδε θάλος χορὸν εἰσοιχνεύσαν.
 κεῖνος δ' αὖ περὶ κῆρι μακάρτατος ἔξοχον ἄλλων,
 ὅς κέ σ' ἐέδνοισι βρῖσας οἰκόνδ' ἀγάγῃται.

But if you are one of the mortals who dwell upon the earth, thrice-blessed are your father and lady mother, thrice-blessed your brothers. Indeed their heart must grow warm with gladness every time they see this sapling of theirs entering the chorus. But the man who is blessed above all others in his heart is he who shall win you with his bride-gifts and lead you to his home.

The repetition of τρὶς μάκαρες followed by μακάρτατος evokes the *makarismos* which formed an important element of wedding ritual.⁶⁸ Thus the blessedness of Nausicaa's parents and brothers is implicitly connected to their hopes for her marriage, while the man who wins her hand is the most blessed of all. Nausicaa's participation in the choral dance is presented as part of this marital process; moreover we again see emphasis placed on the experience of watching the dance as an observer: it is seeing Nausicaa perform publicly which brings her family joy.

The Nausicaa episode, then, is configured in such a way as to evoke the *topos* of parthenaic dance as a form of female display and a precursor to marriage. For the scene to work effectively, the audience must be aware of these cultural triggers, and so recognise that Nausicaa's interaction with Odysseus is cast in the mould of a seduction scene. Nausicaa's participation in a quasi-choral dance presents Odysseus as a potential seducer or even rapist; likewise, Odysseus' role as observer of this dance heightens our concern that he may become trapped on Phaeacia. Implicit in this scene, then, are a set of associations related to female dance and display, which even at this early period are firmly embedded in the audience's expectations.

68 Cf. Hes. fr. 211.7 M.-W.; Sapph. fr. 112 v.; Aristoph. *Birds* 1721–1725, *Peace* 1333.

Conclusion

The connection between parthenaic performance, visual language, and female transition is a deep-rooted one, and one for which we need not seek a particular ritual context or initiation ritual. When choruses of young women perform, emphasis is placed on their physical appearance and the gestures and movements of their dance, and this focus remains consistent regardless of the *polis* they belong to or the details of the festival in which they participate. Not only is this borne out by an examination of the few surviving parthenaic fragments; it is also demonstrated by analysis of the way in which female choruses are presented in a range of other texts. Moreover, this form of visual self-referentiality is a phenomenon particularly associated with female song, and which we do not find in the types of deixis employed by male performers.

This observation is further connected with the idea that female choral dance was an opportunity for young girls to be safely displayed to society at large, and potentially to prospective suitors and their families. The emphasis on luxurious trappings and accessories becomes relevant in this context, for emphasising the fine clothes and jewellery the girls wear may also be a way of hinting at the wealth of their families, and the dowries they can command. Yet the male gaze is not simply a process endured by the female dancers, for the choruses actively attempt to control and direct the gaze of their audience. Thus the girls are not presented as passive objects but rather they engage with and court the attention of the onlooker, and do so as part of a strategy to portray themselves as sexually desirable, while simultaneously chaste because of the civically sanctioned context in which this erotic language is found. Moreover, any potential 'marriage market' is a secondary context, for the performances are most frequently presented as part of a religious festival. Thus the girls' fine appearance and captivating movements may be part of the way in which choruses aim to please the gods, with the pleasure given to the mortal spectators safely subsumed as a corollary rather than as the immediate function.

On analysis, the transitional aspect of parthenaic dance is implicitly connected with the figure of the *parthenos* herself, rather than with a specific ritual context. Being a *parthenos* is not a perpetual state but rather one which automatically looks towards a change. At the heart of the *parthenos*' identity lies a paradox: she is attractive precisely because she is not yet a mature and married woman, yet it is also her capacity to undergo that transition which makes her desirable. Hence scholars are right to see transition as essential to the understanding of *partheneia*, yet this transition is connected to the performers and their identity rather than to any external context, and its pan-Hellenic cultural importance is attested by its presence in myth and in poetic scenes associ-

ated with female sexual development. Thus despite the paucity of authentic parthenaic poetry, the evidence of the surviving fragments is enriched and supported by other texts. *Partheneia*'s focus on the visual is not a coincidence, nor is it simply a decorative feature, but rather it is a mechanism for exploring ideas central to the songs' social function.

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